

Decorah Public
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^{108 172}Local officials feel Decorah should be chosen for Great Places project

By Sarah Strandberg

Local officials believe the Decorah area has what it takes to be considered a "Great Place."

At a forum last week sponsored by the Decorah Area Chamber of Commerce, in partnership with Winneshiek County Economic Development and Winneshiek County Convention and Visitors Bureau (WCCVB), a group of about 20 citizens agreed the community meets all the criteria for the Iowa Department of Economic Development's (IDED) new Iowa Great Places program.

A letter will be sent to the Iowa

Department of Cultural Affairs before July 1 asking for the greater Decorah area to be considered for an Iowa Great Places pilot project.

The IDED initiative sets out seven categories for "Great Places." They should offer: A unique sense of place, engaging experiences, a rich solid fabric, a vital economy, a pleasing environment, a strong foun-

dation and a creative culture.

The concept of the program is to pool the resources available at the state level to promote bold thought, innovation and entrepreneurship to cultivate the unique and authentic qualities that make places in Iowa so special.

During last week's forum, several projects that would be well suited for the Great Place program were discussed. They included: cleanup of the Upper Iowa River, Trails of Winneshiek projects, the East Side School renovation, a community center, a cultural district, a county historical museum, a tourism information center, visitors' center, environmental learning center focusing on the Upper Iowa River and a permanent location with a building for the Winneshiek Farmers' Market.

"The purpose of the Great Places

Great Place

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Great Places

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initiative is for a community/place to come up with a vision that would build upon already existing strengths, and would help to transform a good place into a great place. The vision does not necessarily have to be a project, it can be something broader," WCCVB Executive Director Annique Kiel explained.

She noted all the projects mentioned during the forum had a theme of places where people gather or that bring people together.

"This idea could serve as the vision – that we would like to enhance/develop gathering spots in the greater Decorah area," Kiel said.

The state will be selecting three communities for pilot projects.

After the Department of Cultural Affairs reviews the letters from interested communities, "coaches" will be assigned to assist them with

their proposals.

Winneshiek County Development Inc. Director Randy Uhl said the prospect of being selected for the program has created a lot of enthusiasm.

"It's getting people together to come up with a project that's suitable for this program," he said.

He also emphasized that no new funding has been allocated for the Great Places program, but that it would "streamline" the process for seeking state grant money.

"If selected as a pilot community, Decorah/Winneshiek County would have the assistance of state government agencies working together as true partners to stimulate ideas and planning, to help leverage local and private resources and to share technical expertise," he said.